



Expanding Access to Help for Veterans in Crisis: The Veterans Online Self-Check Quiz

Kimberley Mullen, Ph.D.
Caitlin Thompson, Ph.D.

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Learning Objectives

- At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:
 1. Describe the goals and procedures of the Veterans Self-Check Quiz;
 2. Understand how this assessment option is integrated with the online Veterans Chat Service and the Veterans Crisis Line;
 3. Identify the key outcomes obtained during the initial 6-month pilot implementation of the Veterans Self-Check Quiz;
 4. Understand the implications of these findings for suicide prevention among Veterans.

Veterans Crisis Line

- Began in 2007
- Collaboration between Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- 1-800-273-TALK (8255) - Press 1
- Offered to Veterans, current military service members, family, and friends
- 1,000 calls per day

Online Option: Veterans Chat Service

- Began in 2009
- 75 Crisis Line responders work as Chat Counselors
- Over 50,000 Chats to date
- Observations:
 - Many successes
 - Small number of Chats relative to total website traffic suggested difficulties in starting a Chat
 - Other difficulties: Identifying and describing troubling issues, feelings, and experiences

Veterans Self-Check Quiz

- **Who:** Partnership of the Dept. of Veterans Affairs, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
- **What:** An online mental health questionnaire for Veterans with personalized response from a Counselor within 30 minutes and opportunity for follow-up online Chats
- **Why:** Improve *ease of initiation* through a structured way for Veterans to identify and describe feelings and problems; improve *quality of chats* by giving Counselor a clearer sense of the Veteran's needs
- **When:** "Quiet" launch April 2011

Model: AFSP's Interactive Screening Program (ISP)

- Goal: Identify and engage at-risk college students to get help
- Invited via email from college official to take a brief, anonymous Stress & Depression Questionnaire on a secure website
- Personalized response by trained Counselor posted on website
- 4 “severity” tiers determine Counselor’s recommendations for further contact (face-to-face, online dialogues)
 - Mention of suicide
 - Significant/severe symptoms
 - Mild to moderate symptoms
 - No significant symptoms or distress (rare)

ISP Results

- 8-15% of invited students submitted Questionnaire
- Represented 45-85% of students estimated to have clinically significant mental health problems
- > 90% of respondents had significant psychological problems and were not receiving treatment
- 90% reviewed the Counselor's response
- About a third eventually came for face-to-face services
- Students who engaged in online, anonymous dialogues with the Counselor were 3-4x more likely to come for in-person services

Published Studies

Garlow SJ, Rosenberg J, Moore JD, Haas AP, et al. (2008). Depression, desperation, and suicidal ideation in college students: Results from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention College Screening Project at Emory University. *Depression & Anxiety*, 25(6), 482-488.

Haas AP, Koestner B, Rosenberg J, Moore D, Garlow SJ, et al. (2008). An interactive Web-based method of outreach to college students at risk for suicide. *Journal of American College Health*, 57(1), 15-22.


Moutier C, Norcross W, Jong P, Norman M, Kirby, et al. (2012) The Suicide Prevention and Depression Awareness Program at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine. *Academic Medicine*, 87(3), 327-331.

Modifications for Veterans Self-Check Quiz

- Questionnaire modified to include PTSD and TBI items
- Automatic reference code system developed to identify users (vs. encrypted email address)
- Procedures adapted for 15-30 minute response (vs. 24 hours)
- “While you are waiting” webpages developed to keep users online
- Counselor response templates modified to focus on referrals to locally-based VA services (vs. engagement in treatment with responding Counselor)
- Interface developed to link secure website housing the assessment and response functions with the existing Veterans Chat Service for further online communications between user and Counselor

www.veteranscrisisline.net

SuicidePreventionLifeline.org Get Help Materials Get Involved Crisis Centers Newsroom About



**Veterans
Crisis Line**
1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

Dial **1-800-273-8255** **PRESS 1**

Text to **838255**

Confidential Veterans Chat

I am a **Veteran**

I am **Family/Friend**


Confidential Help for Veterans and Their Families

Signs of Crisis

Resources

Get Help

About



"I AM A VETERAN.
The road is hard, but there's help out there, all you have to do is ask. Start by calling the Veterans Crisis Line."
Orvie Longhorn,
U.S. Army, 1964–1967

1 2 3 4 5

Welcome to the **Veterans Crisis Line Website**

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. Veterans and their loved ones can call **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, **chat online**, or send a text message to **838255** to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
[More about the Veterans Crisis Line](#)

Are You a Veteran or Concerned About One?

Act Now

Dial **1-800-273-8255** **PRESS 1**
to talk to someone NOW

Confidential Veterans Chat

Text to **838255** to Get Help NOW

Take a Self-Check Quiz

Confidential Homeless Veterans Chat

Learn Now

Identify the Warning Signs

Concerned About a Veteran? You Can Help

Suicide and Crisis Resources

About the Veterans Crisis Line

Results from 6-Month Pilot

- Total 5,584 Quizzes submitted (April 27 – October 31, 2011)
- Average # of monthly users in September and October, 2011 = 1,300
- 43 per day
- 68% of all users mentioned suicide
- 69% reviewed the Counselor's response
- 53% of those who reviewed the response (37% of all users) entered the online Chat with a counselor

Results from 6-Month Pilot

- Status
 - 67% Veterans
 - 9% Active Duty Military
 - 24% Others (most had relationship to a Veteran)

- Gender
 - 67% Male
 - 32% Female
 - 1% Transgender

Outcomes from 6-Month Pilot Project: Demographics

Status	Female (%)	Average Age (SD)	Total
Veteran	838 (22)	Male = 44 (13) Female = 38 (11)	3,844
Active Duty	80 (21)	Male = 31 (8) Female = 30 (10)	384
Relationship to Veteran	730 (65)	Male = 28 (12) Female = 26 (12)	1,116
Total			5,344

Outcomes from 6-Month Pilot Project: Chat Requested

Status	No Chat (%)	Requested Chat (%)	Total
Veteran	2,416 (63)	1,428 (37)	3,844
Active Duty	265 (69)	119 (31)	384
Relationship to Veteran	784 (70)	332 (30)	1,116
Total	3,465 (65)	1,879 (35)	5,344

Outcomes from 6-Month Pilot Project: Veterans vs. Active Duty

- Compared to Active Duty respondents, Veterans reported:
 - Significantly higher levels of stress/anxiety, PTSD, and depression symptoms
 - Higher incidence of TBI
 - Greater likelihood to be on psychotropic medications
- No differences were reported for difficulties with substance use, eating or self-directed harm

*All tests were significant at $p < .001$

Outcomes from 6-Month Pilot Project: Symptoms Reported

Status	Stress & Anxiety	Substance Use	Eating	PTSD	Depression	TBI	SDV	Meds
Veteran	0.0000**	0.0009**	0.1040	0.1824	0.0000**	0.2993	0.0005**	0.0477*
Active Duty	0.0022**	0.4650	0.0189*	0.0512*	0.0022*	0.1951	0.2835	0.0265*
Relationship to Veteran	0.0000**	0.0420*	0.2933	0.0005**	0.0000**	0.3764	0.0000**	0.4024
<p>*p<.05 **p<.001</p>								

What Worked

- Clear acceptability among Veterans in need of services
- Technical aspects worked well despite lots of suggestions from counselors
- Counselors had strong buy-in; took pride in “owning” the system; overwhelmingly credited the SCQ with improving their ability to understand and help users
- Over half of the users who reviewed Counselor response entered Chat
- Users overwhelmingly expressed gratitude for personal contact/support/advice

Challenges

- 31% of those who submitted the Quiz did not stay or return to get the Counselor's response
- Outcomes of Chat not possible to ascertain, except through Counselor ratings
- Counselors expressed frustration that they couldn't do more

Implications for Future Program Development and Implementation

- Promising tool for engaging Veterans in identifying needs and exploring options for getting help
- Enhancing “seamlessness” of transition from online to in-person services may facilitate entry into treatment and collection of follow-up data
- Tool may be effectively implemented to reach out to Veterans and Active Duty Military through locally-based service delivery systems

Thank you.

Kimberley.Mullen2@va.gov
Caitlin.Thompson@va.gov